

HB 4369 Testimony
House Education Committee
March 13, 2013

Thank you Chairwoman Lyons and members of the House Education Committee for accepting my remarks on HB 4369. I know that you all have made great efforts to understand the EAA's implementation in Detroit and I also appreciate your Committee's ongoing dialogue with the Michigan Department of Education staff on this very important statewide issue.

My name is Tracy Peters and I have attended all but two of the SEC, HEC and State Board of Education hearings on the EAA since November, 2012. As a Detroit resident and someone who, like many of you, has actually utilized the EAA's learning platform called "Buzz," I feel that my comments are worthy of your consideration today.

Since HB 4369 (the "new" EAA bill) has been introduced, I hear two chief concerns reflected by queries from your Committee's legislators as well as from members of the House Appropriations Committee: 1) funding; and 2) measurable data on student achievement.

Great Start and the EAA both fall under the jurisdiction of educational appropriations and, thus, should be questioned as you consider the future of Michigan's schools. At March 6, 2013's Joint Appropriations/Education/Human Services hearing, Representative Genetski rightfully probed Susan Broman as to why money should be allotted for Great Start. At this very least, identical scrutiny must be applied to any future appropriations for the EAA; particularly since this body is considering expansion to 50 schools statewide in the 2013-2014 school year. Just two months ago, the EAA sought a \$2 million advance to fund its operations and technology improvements after their philanthropic funds fell short. How will this affect our State's budget and all of Michigan's schoolchildren if the EAA makes an identical request at this time next year? EAA Chancellor Covington stated at March 6th's HEC hearing that private donations amounted to \$25 million for the start of the 2012-13 school year and that after October 1, 2012, the EAA received foundation dollars. Three months later, the EAA Board of Directors held a hearing asking the state to cover funds that their initial private donations could not match. This is too risky and so I urge this group to demand from EAA officials, firm funding commitments from their future private benefactors.

I would also like to respond to several legislators' queries into "measurable data" for the EAA and for educational programs in general. Again referencing March 6th's joint Committee hearing, representatives rightfully scrutinized data related to "programs that work." I urge the members of this Committee to apply that same scrutiny to any test data originating with the EAA and to not rely solely on one line from Chancellor Covington in a recent Detroit News article, "this shows the EAA is working." Ask the same questions of Mary Esselman's data that you did of Susan Broman and the Perry Project.

Representatives Crawford, Lyons, Hooker and Abed (and others) shared their experiences attending EAA schools. It is on this point where I respectfully dissent from those of you holding the opinion that Buzz is an appropriate learning tool for children. Buzz is a solitary experience for many children who attend EAA schools. Despite their claim that it is part of a blended

learning model, blended learning cannot always occur if the teacher has too many students, has to spend time untangling laptop cords from the technology cart, or simply has materials which do not work. If the classroom teacher does not want to help or is unable to help their students, Buzz is nothing more than 45 minutes of silent reading comprehension. I recently took the Michigan Bar exam and Buzz is designed exactly like my Bar review course where I was being prepared to memorize and digest large quantities of information for a single test; not master new material for lifelong learning.

I oppose codification of HB 4369 and propose the following changes: 1) if you must go forward with a statewide reform district, please start over with a new list of schools in the fall of 2013. The current EAA schools were chosen under P.A. 4's provision that an EM could choose these schools with no transparency and oversight. Although P.A. 436 will go into effect on March 28, 2013, Michigan voters rejected Emergency Financial Managers in November 2012 and it is bad policy to have a statewide school district where the criteria for school selection is unknown to state residents; and 2) continue to provide the EAA with an extended school day and year as this investment pays off in student achievement and learning opportunities for students who desperately need them.

Please continue to dialogue with state residents about this very important issue. This is not "turning a blind eye" to students in low-performing schools; rather, it is taking a thoughtful and client-centered approach to a serious and multi-faceted problem.

Respectfully submitted by Tracy Peters to the House Education Committee on March 13, 2013.